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ABSTRACT

A content analysis was conducted to assess the verbal climate of Saturday morning television programs, the types of verbal aggression that appear in them, and the way verbal responses relate to other program variables. Three content analysis tools were developed and applied to ten half-hour program blocks drawn randomly from the regularly scheduled programs broadcast in the Denver, Colorado, area by the three network affiliates. Among the conclusions were that the white male adult was vocally and visually dominant in the programs and that several social stereotypes were reinforced. Television characters usually operated from a neutrally valued verbal cluster (stating feelings and opinions, observing, describing, or instructing), but when the dominant mode of verbal response was not used, the verbal behavior became more defensive, personally attacking, and commanding. The programs exhibited less positively valued communication behavior by attractive than by unattractive characters, and they implied that supportive communication does not help, and defensive communication does not really hinder, problem resolution. Although defensiveness was associated with less "real" character types (animated characters and nonhumans), the extent to which young children attend to nonhuman characters is not known at this time. (GT)

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THE LANGUAGE OF THE SATURDAY MORNING GHETTO

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THE LANGUAGE OF THE SATURDAY MORNING GHETTO

The potential effects of television on children -- particularly television's violent content -- have long been a matter of concern. The extensive research attempting to correlate television violence to aggression or deviant behavior suggests the topic's perceived significance. Within the plethora of studies, however, one facet has been little scrutinized -- the verbal dimension of children's programming remains an unknown factor. Although television primarily is a visual medium, oral communication is a part of that medium. Until this dimension of the television social reality is explored, measured, and correlated to other dimensions, our grasp of the world of television and its potential effects on children will be incomplete.

Background and Importance of the Problem: Summary

Early studies in England (Himmelweit, 1958), North America (Schramm, 1961), and Japan (Furu, 1971, a replication of Schramm) illustrated the pervasive presence of television in the lives of children and spurred interest in further investigations. The six volumes of The Surgeon General's Research program on Television and Social Behavior (1972) and the bibliography accompanying that report (Murray,

Nayman, and Atkin, 1971-1972) provide a comprehensive summary of the resultant boom in television violence research.

Although research which assesses the demographics of television (see for example, Watt and Knull, 1977; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977; and Barcus and Wolkin, 1977) or attempts to correlate television violence and behavior (see for example, Liebert and Baron, 1972) has continued, recent research has focused on the content and effects of advertising. Organizations like Action for Children's Television (ACT) have mobilized to attempt alteration of the Federal Communications Commission regulations, federal law concerning advertising during programs geared to children, and/or the policies of local stations (see for example, Barcus and Wolkin, 1977; Atkin and Heald, 1977; Breen and Powell, 1973; Melody, 1973; Robertson and Rossiter, 1977; Sarson, 1971, and Reply Comments: Action for Children's Television, 1971).

From the research conducted in various dimensions of the television effect question, several assumptions about the relationship between children and television have become generally accepted. These include: (1) television, in some fashion or another, contributes to the socialization of the child (Liebert, 1972; Noble, 1975; Leifer, Gordon and Graves, 1974), as television is a

source of stimulus during a child's formative years; (2) children are capable of repeating and/or learning behavior from television (Leifer and Roberts, 1972), although researchers posit differing reasons for and extent of the possible effect (Rodgers, 1972; Salomon, 1974; Meyer, 1973; and Milkovich, 1974); (3) television affects some children differently than others depending on a variety of characteristics and individual needs (Schramm, 1961; Hawkins, 1977), although it is difficult to predict how television would affect any given child; and (4) both the atmosphere or climate of television and isolated actions by specific characters probably combine in influencing the child (McLeod, Atkin, and Chaffee, 1972).

If the above assumptions are correct, particularly those concerning television's potential influence in the socialization process, then current trends in research have omitted one dimension of children's programming necessary to build a balanced perspective on the climate of children's programs. While many studies devote intense analysis to character motivation, the various means by which one person may do physical violence to another, percentages of women and minorities, number and type of commercials, character occupation, etc., most studies largely ignore the verbal content of the programs. Research in television's violent content epitomizes this fault. Violence usually is defined as physical aggression

by one human toward another. The sphere utilized in most studies is exemplified in Gerbner's analysis (1972):

> Violence connotes a great variety of physical and mental violations, emotions, injustices, and transgressions of social and moral norms. For this study violence was defined in its strictest physical sense as an arbiter of power. . . only "overt expression of physical force against others or self, or the compelling of action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed" (p. 31).

The few studies which mention verbal content usually limit the coding to "yelling" and similar displays of violent emotions (McLeod, Atkin, and Chaffee, 1973). A more detailed study (Stein, Friedrich, and Vodracek, 1972) included "jeering, threatening, angry talk, . . . and derogation" as categories. Apparently, the assumption leading to past decisions to omit verbal elements is similar to that expressed by McLeod, Atkin and Chaffee (1972): "Verbal aggression may be seen as a kind of alternative to more direct physical aggression; therefore we consider it a distinctly different type of behavior" (p. 265). Whether verbal aggression occurs in concert with, is an alternative to, or is independent from physical aggression, verbal manifestations also have the potential to communicate aggressiveness or violent intentions. Thus, the need for scutiny of verbal aggression and other verbal forms is as great as the need for analysis of other content features.

As researchers measuring the aggressive responses of school children seem to have realized, one must include all possible dimensions of social reality to acquire an in-depth knowledge of that which is studied (see Paulson, et al., 1970). To understand the social reality presented by television, one must correlate the verbal dimensions to other dimensions of the programs. As Gerson (1968) commented:

> Violence need not be limited solely to physical behavior. Violence can also be conceptualized to include non-physical behavior resulting in social or mental injury, such as damage to one's self-concept or to one's reputation (p. 153).

Although Gerson's research paradigm differs significantly from the one developed in this study, his notation that violence has many dimensions -- some of which are non-physical -- necessitates an integrated research perspective. The verbal dimensions, labeled by Gerson as the "most common mode of violent behavior in America today" (p. 153) have not received adequate attention from the research community.

An analysis of the verbal dimension of children's programming is necessary for the following reasons: (1) to provide a more complete basis for analysis of the climate television programs present to children, (2) to determine the nature of television's verbal content in light of its potential impact on the socialization process and initial language development, and (3) to develop a category system to measure verbal aggression and other verbal response types.

Overview

Although many previous analyses of television's content have been conducted by researchers from outside the rhetorical/communication discipline, questions concerning television -- judgmental, policy, or aesthetic -- fall within the communicologist's purview. Clearly, television is communication; clearly, its message is rhetorical. Whether the research be descriptive, as is this study, critical, or experimental, television is an area of legitimate interest for our discipline. "Formal" communications (oral, written, or symbolic) are the historic, first domain of rhetoric/communication. Assessing the function, utility, and/or quality of communicative experiences is one unique service offered by communication/rhetoric.

The descriptive method of content analysis was chosen as the research perspective most appropriate to this inquiry. The study does not attempt to answer questions of policy, determine "effects," or solve the important issues in children's television. Rather, the research approach (content analysis) facilitates what Barcus (1977) called the function of

> "cultural indicators" of important aspects of society. Such indicators give us a picture of the overall nature of children's television and point up changes and trends over time (p.v.).

One goal of the study, facilitated by the content analysis method, was establishment of levels or baselines of verbal response types in the 1978 sample. Like Gerbner's violence index (1968, 1972), a baseline measure will alow future researchers to assess changes in the environment over time.

Three tools were developed for content analysis of a random sample of Saturday morning programs: (1) "Context Data Tool" was designed to measure the program's non-verbal features -- format, time, setting, character features, etc.; (2) "Categories of Valued Interpersonal Response" was designed to categorize types of verbal responses; and (3) "Gibb Derived Tool" was developed to assess whether verbal statements contained supportive, defensive, or neutral overtones. After each tool was tested for intercoder reliability, the tools were revised and retested, applied to the sample, and the results submitted for analysis.[1]

Procedures

This research was undertaken to seek answers to three questions: (1) What is the verbal climate of Saturday morning programs? (2) What types of verbal aggression appear in these programs? (3) How do verbal aggression and other types of responses relate to other program variables (program format, sex, etc.).

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[1] SPSS program FREQUENCY was applied to the data. Another version of this report specifies methodlogical procedures and the process of tool development.

Climate was viewed from two perspectives. First, and most important, was climate as discussed by Gibb's (1961) treatise on supportive and defensive communication. A content analysis coding device, called the Gibb Derived Tool (GDT), was developed to assess the prevalence of supportive, defensive, or neutral statements.[2] Second, climate also was considered in its more general meaning -- what characteristic elements pervade the Saturday morning verbal dimensions and, thereby, may be considered to be climate features?

To assess verbal aggression, a second content analysis tool was developed offering a wide variety of possible types of interpersonal responses. The tool, called Categories of Valued Interpersonal Response (CVIR), partially was derived from Sieberg and Larsen's (1971) Categories of Interpersonal Response. The CVIR is titled a "valued" instrument as certain categories of responses were assumed to be perceived generally as aggressive, negative, positive, or neutral -- i.e., most persons would perceive a threat as negative.

The CVIR contained two coder choices. The first coded a statement as "Aggressive" or "Not Aggressive."[3] The second choice determined which of six clusters of verbal responses best fit a statement: (1) Personal Attack, Challenge; (2) Threatening, Ordering, Rage; (3) Questioning, Clarifying, Wondering; (4) Opinions, Observations, Instructions, Feelings; (5) Acknowledges Other Only; (6) Singing.[4]

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[2]The GDT was accepted with a .742 pretest reliability

[3]Pretest reliabilty was .753

[4]Pretest reliability was .695

To determine general program variables, a Context Data Tool (CXT) was developed. The CXT assessed program type, tone, format, and character features such as motivation, sex, leadership.[5]

The three tools developed for the study were applied to ten half-hour program blocks drawn randomly from the regularly scheduled programs between 0600 and 1200 as broadcast in the Denver area by the three network affiliates. Advertisements, movies, sports, and features which preempted regular programming were excluded. In addition to the Saturday morning programs, the Peanuts Easter Special was included as an example of a "family hour" cartoon program. All segments were videotaped in March or April of 1978.

Sample programs were videotaped, broken into codable segments (introduction, segments of longer programs), and transcribed. Transcripts were broken into utterances. An utterance was defined as a statement by one character to another character where the line of thought remained stable (similar to Mark, 1971). A new utterance would begin whenever a character finished one thought, spoke to a different character, or a new character began speaking. The CVIR and GDT were applied to each utterance appearing in the transcript. The CXT was applied to each segment division.

The data resulting from content analysis were analyzed as follows: First each category of the CXT, and the totaled codes from the GDT and CVIR were considered as

[5]Pretest reliability for all categories was .667 or above.

variables for analysis. Frequencies were applied to the data. As the study involved setting baselines on newly investigated data, all interpretations of results were conservative and reported as "tendencies" only.

A second analysis was the establishment of levels of various types of verbal response forms appearing in the corpus. Levels were determined by comparing the number of a type of verbal response (T_i) for a variable (V_i) to the total number of responses (T_n) within that variable category. In other words, for any particular category

$$L = \frac{T_i}{T_n}$$

If the verbal response category was "aggression" and the variable character Charlie Brown, his level of verbal aggression would be his total of words occurring in verbally aggressive statements (T_i) divided into the total words he uttered. Levels were established for each character and all relevant category combinations.

The analysis in this study involved a series of divergent ways of approaching the data. The varied approaches served two purposes: (1) to gain greater insights into the verbal dimensions of Saturday morning television by using different lenses for analysis, (2) to attempt development of tools adequate to the task of analyzing verbal dimensions.

Results

Main Verbal Categories

Within twenty-three segments, 139 different message sources were identified as presenting ± 19,600 vocal utterances.[6] Of the ten most frequent message sources, nine were male and one was female. One segment, Marlo and the Magic Movie Machine, accounted for 17.8 percent of the total corpus.

The most frequent user of supportive language was Marlo, probably due to his dominance in total language usage. By frequency, the top ten users of supportive words included three females and seven males; six real humans and four animated or non-humans. By level of supportive word usage, three of the highest users are animated characters, four are real humans; four are male, three female. Fifty-eight percent of one character's language was supportive (the highest level), with the seventh densest level being 30 percent.

The most frequent user of defensive words was a male human actor portraying a high school teacher. Eight of the ten most frequent defensive word users were human actors. By level of defensive word usage, the ten densest users of defensive language all were male; all but one were human actors. Of the top ten speakers by level, defensive language density varied from 100 to 70 percent.

The most frequent user of aggressive words was an animated male animal. Eight of the top ten aggressors were

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[6] Originally, the statement was intended as the main level of language analysis in determining frequencies and usage. However, during the process of transcription and coding, it became clear that some characters used longer utterances than others. As length of utterance was not a focus of the study and the variability in length of statements would not adequately represent the amount of language uttered by a character, frequencies were tabulated on words within statements. Because laughter often affected coder decisions on aggressiveness and other categories, occurrences of laughter are counted as a word in frequency tabulations.

male; two were female. Three of the top ten aggressors were human actors; seven were animated or other. By level of aggressive word usage, the nine densest users were animated; one was a human male, Jonathan Winters, portraying a human female. Levels varied among the top ten from 100 to 42 percent.

The ten most frequent users of the attack cluster include three females and seven males, six animated characters and four humans. When reordered by levels of usage of the attack cluster, the most dense users were animated with one exception; the other is a real human male portraying a real human female. Six of the top ten users of the attack cluster by level are male; four are female. Level density varied amont the top ten from 100 to 36 percent.

The ten most frequent users of the order cluster included one real human, eight animated, and one monster character. Eight of the top ten users of the order cluster are male; two are female. By rank order of level of usage of the order cluster, one is a real human portraying a superhero (Isis); nine are animated characters. Two are female; eight are male. Levels varied among the top ten from 46 to 24 percent.

The ten most frequent users of the question cluster include four females, five males, and one other. Five of the top ten question cluster users are real humans. By rank order of level of usage of the question cluster, all but one are animated; eight are male and two are female. Among the top ten, percentages of use varied from 39 to 16 percent.

The ten most frequent users of the opinion cluster include eight real humans, one monster, and one other. All are male or other. By rank order of level of usage of the opinion cluster, five are real humans and five are animated; half are male and half are female. Percentages of use varied among the top ten from 100 (four characters) to 95 percent.

Only four characters used ten or more words in verbal follower clusters. Most verbal followers occurred in Marlo and the Magic Movie Machine, which is a dialogue talk show.

Only three characters used ten or more words in the singing cluster category. All three characters are animated animals.

The segment with the greatest sum word frequency is Marlo and the Magic Movie Machine; Marlo also has the greatest single character word usage. The character who most dominates his or her individual segment's verbal language usage is Bugs Bunny in the second transitional segment. Second and third in segment dominance are also animated -- Daffy Duck in the first transitional segment and Autocat in the Birthday segment.

By frequency of word occurrence, Fat Albert was the most supportive segment, Isis the most defensive, Land of the Lost the most aggressive. Viewing the six subcategories of the CVIR, Peanuts contained the most

frequent usage of the attack cluster; Land of the Lost was highest by the order cluster; Captain Caveman and the Teenangels contained the most questions; Marlo and the Magic Movie Machine evidenced the greatest number of verbal followers and opinions; and Fat Albert offered more singing than any other segment. Five segments were void of supportive statements; only two evidenced an absence of defensive statements. Four segments did not contain statements perceived by coders as aggressive. The attack cluster was lacking in four segments, the order cluster in four, the question cluster in two, verbal followers in nine, and singing in fifteen of the twenty-three segments.

The segment with the highest level of supportive language was the Surfboard segment from Hotdog; the highest level of defensive language occurred in the "Pop, I'm Pop" segment of the Bugs Bunny/Road Runner Show. "Pop, I'm Pop" was also highest in level of aggressive language. Within the six subcategories of the CVIR, Peanuts sustained its top rank as containing the most frequent and highest level of the attack cluster; "Pop" had the highest level of the order cluster; Caveman retained its position as exhibiting the most occurrences and highest level of the question cluster; the guitar segment contained opinions only; Marlo also contained the highest level of verbal followers; and the "Introduction" to the Bugs Bunny/Road Runner Show evidenced the highest level of singing.

Language Usage by Context Features

The frequency and levels of verbal responses by program type, tone, and format showed that although more language occurred in animated segments, both segments portrayed by human actors and segments with a mixture of real humans and animation contained higher frequency and levels of supportive language. Animated segments contained the highest frequency and levels of both defensive and aggressive language. Within the six subdivisions of the CVIR, animated segments contained the highest level and frequency on the attack and question clusters, the highest frequency only on the order cluster. Segments with real human actors were highest in the opinion and verbal follower clusters; segments with a mixture of human and animation were highest in the order (level) and singing clusters (level and frequency).

Three times more verbal language occurred in segments of serious tone than those coded as comedies. Serious segments surpassed comedy in all subcategories of total verbal response. However, comedy segments evidenced higher levels of response in defensive, aggressive, the attack cluster, the order cluster, and equalled serious segments in the verbal follower cluster.

By format,[7] comedies contained the greatest total word frequency. Comedies also contained more frequent use of language within the subcategories of verbal usage except for the "other" category of the GDT where educational

[7] Format codes included comedy, educational, governmental, among other types of programs.

formats dominated. By level, the most supportive format was family drama; comedy was most defensive and aggressive. Educational formats were least aggressive and defensive. Within the six subcategories of the CVIR, comedies contained the highest levels of the attack cluster and tied with adventure in the singing cluster. Family drama evidenced the highest level of the order cluster; mysteries dominated the question cluster. Science fiction formats dominated the opinion cluster; educational segments contained the highest level of verbal followers.

White male adults led all other groups in total verbal response across all categories except aggression (animal male adult) and the singing cluster but did not rank first in any category in levels of response. By levels, the most supportive group was animal female children; the most defensive and aggressive was monster male adult. Within the subcategories of the CVIR, the monster male adult evidenced the highest level in the attack cluster; the chicano male adult led all other groups in the command cluster; the black female adult used more language within the question cluster; not determinable led in the opinion cluster (a computer); the oriental female child had the highest usage of verbal followers; and animal male children surpassed the other group utilizing singing. Most character types which dominated usage by level are comprised of only one character in that type.

By character motivation, for characters coded as having the motives featured in the brutality cluster, defensive language dominated in both frequency and level. Characters with the power and money clusters as a motive also used defensive language more than supportive or other. No character motive had a level greater than .2 for supportive statements; the motive group containing the highest level and frequency of supportive language was freedom. No motive group evidenced a level of greater than .5 for aggressive language; brutality was highest in level and frequency. Within the six subcategories of the CVIR, characters motivated by group success surpassed all other groups in frequency of the attack, order, and opinion clusters; freedom topped the question cluster in frequency; and adventure motivated characters used more verbal followers.

Characters who actually injured others with impunity used more total word frequency than any other violence group. The most supportive violence group by frequency were those who got hurt but committed no violence; by level the most supportive group were those who hurt self only. The most defensive using violence group by frequency were those who tried to hurt another and got hurt; by level the most defensive character was the one who tried to hurt another and got killed, followed in rank by those who tried to injure another and got hurt. The same group led in aggressive frequency with the character who tried to injure another and

got killed leading all other groups by level. Under the six subcategories of the CVIR, those who tried to injure another and got killed had the highest level within the attack cluster; those who tried to injure another and got hurt led in this cluster by frequency. The latter group also led in frequency of the command, verbal follower, and singing clusters. By frequency, those who tried to injure with impunity used more questions, and those who actually hurt others with impunity led in the opinion cluster. By level and frequency, the same group retained prominence in the command and singing clusters. Those who unintentionally caused harm to others had the highest level of questions; those who injured with impunity led by level in the opinion cluster; and those who hurt self only led by level in the verbal follower cluster.

Characters who were parents used defensive language most in both frequency and level. The opinion cluster was the parents' most frequent response type from the CVIR and the command cluster was second in usage by frequency and level.

Males uttered over four times as many total words as females and, subsequently, led in total frequency in all verbal categories. By level, females were more supportive, defensive, aggressive, attacking, and questioning. Males were more non-supportive, non-defensive, commanding, opinioning, and used more verbal followers and singing.

Numerous other variables were studied and are reported in full elsewhere. While time and space does not

permit a thorough presentation of all variables here, general tendencies from this data are included in the following section.

Summary

The general environment of the Saturday morning viewing hours as broadcast by the Denver network affiliates predominantly is characterized by themes of interpersonal rivalry, realistic urban settings, animated presentation, and comic formats. Programs are likely to include some type of chase scene and injury to a character. More adults will be seen as main characters than children; more males will be seen than females; and white male adults will appear most of all. Main characters evidence several different motivations. The most frequent motives seen are group success or freedom. Most main characters will not be parents, heroes or villains and will avoid involvement in physical violence. Most main characters may be inferred to be average in strength and attractiveness and do not possess striking physical attributes. Most main characters neither laugh nor hold one of the eight occupations coded for in the study.

Saturday morning viewing hours are dominated by main characters who utter approximately three-fourths of all language used (non-main characters account for the remainder). By frequency, more language occurs in animated

programs, in programs of serious tone, and in comedy formats. The main character who appears most often, the white male adult, also speaks most often. As a group, males speak more often than females; adults speak more often than children. Most main characters who speak do not exhibit behaviors associated with the motives described in the study; of those who do, speakers motivated by group success or freedom speak most often. Most main characters who speak are not involved in physical violence; those who are speak more often if they actually hurt others with impunity or are a victim who commits no violence.

Most main characters who speak did not possess the physical attributes identified in the study. Of those coded as possessing a distinct physical attribute, leaders and attractive characters spoke most often. Most language was uttered by characters identified as neither heroes nor villains and as non-parents. Most main characters did not laugh; of those who did, those laughed at by others spoke most of all. Most main characters had no occupation or an occupation other than those identified in the study. Of those performing identifiable occupational roles, professionals spoke most often. For all characters who spoke in the sample time period, males spoke over four times as much as females.

In general, main characters were most likely to utter statements perceived as opinions, observations, instructions, statements of feelings, and descriptions that

were not aggressive, supportive, or defensive. Main characters were twice as likely to be defensive than supportive and, when not using the opinion cluster, probably were challenging, sarcastic, belittling, blaming, or personally attacking self or another. Almost all types of responses, including supportive and defensive, were uttered more often by the main character who dominated in amount of speaking time, the white male adult. However, when considered by how each main character type allotted time to different categories of verbal responses, animal female adults expended the most time in supportive language (over half) and females were more supportive as a group than males. The viewer would least likely hear a supportive statement from monsters and black adults. Adults expended a considerable amount of their time in defensive communication.

Non-main characters spent over 65 percent of their speaking time in other than defensive or supportive communications, yet were more likely to use supportive than defensive language. Non-main characters invested a minimal amount of time in aggressive verbalizations. No other major differences in language usage occurred between those characters deemed vital to the plot and non-main characters.

Although male main characters were more defensive than female main characters, the pattern of communication behavior shifted when all male and female speakers were considered. As a class, females had greater climate flexi-

bility than males. Females invested more energy in both supportive and defensive utterances than males, who focused their energy on more neutral communications.

Less than 14 percent of all verbalizations were coded as being verbally aggressive. The two CVIR categories deemed aggressive, the attack and command clusters, represented 12 and 8 percent respectively of the total corpus. Verbal aggressiveness did not play a major role in the Saturday morning language environment. Verbal aggression, as coded by the CVIR Part I and the command and attack clusters of the CVIR Part II, most often occurred in animated or mixed comedy segments, was uttered by a non-human male adult, and was motivated by brutality.

Discussion

Saturday morning programs, as evidenced by the results of this study, broadcast a variety of verbal speaking forms which create patterns of interactions forming a television social reality. If children do learn from television and do adapt what is consumed on Saturday morning to everyday communications, television provides several implicit lessons about how persons interact and communicate. In general, these lessons concerning verbal usage follow familiar patterns.

Perhaps the most obvious and familiar message offered by Saturday morning programs is the white male's visual and vocal predominance in society. Females do have main character status and participate in spoken dialogue. However, males, by number alone, overshadow the advances made in female visibility. The more interesting conclusions from the analysis, however, point to the implicit messages these programs offer about general communication patterns.

One way of viewing communication patterns is to conceive communication as occurring in clusters of behaviors with some clusters being exhibited more often than others. The cluster used most often in everyday situations would comprise one's primary mode of communicating. Within the Saturday morning television reality, persons usually operate from a neutrally valued verbal cluster -- stating feelings and opinions, observing, describing, or instructing. When not using the dominant mode of verbal response, Saturday morning verbal behavior became more defensive, personally attacking, and commanding. The attitude potentially implied by these communication patterns is of a diminishing concern for other persons and an increase in behaviors generally perceived as negative within a context of interpersonal communication. In addition, the television reality exhibited less positively valued communication behaviors by those who were attractive or imbued with other positively

valued social attributes; social deviants, victims and weaker persons, had a tendency to move toward a more supportive or approaching mode. Implicitly, television reality may suggest supportive communication is a vehicle used by persons who are not otherwise acceptable. The extent to which these implications reflect reality cannot be determined without further research.

Regardless of how or why these communication images developed in Saturday programming, the potential impact on the child viewer is some general impression about how persons communicate in the world. The impact of these lessons for the child may be diminished as many of the more defensive and attacking communication models are animated or committed by non-humans and, thus, are less "real." However, it is unclear from past research at what age children begin discriminating among program formats and reality levels and if such discriminations occur for verbal forms. If children do not discriminate early among different approximations of reality, the exposure to television communication during one's language development period may create a predispositional set, or at least a role model, for how verbal communication occurs in the world outside the home and family. While Belson's (in Muson, 1978) findings would suggest television has a diminished effect in cartoons or any programming perceived as unreal, his research was conducted on teenage boys and

should not be generalized to children in earlier developmental stages without additional research.

Another implicit message concerning verbal language usage emerging from Saturday morning programs is that supportive communication does not help and defensive communication does not really hinder problem resolution. The conflict resolution offered in these programs, particularly those featuring interpersonal rivalry as the main plot, frequently involved a shift in the plot or a dramatic resolution -- not a result of working through the problem or a function of communication skills. Because one does not see or hear the problem being confronted or any processes of conflict management, the quality of the characters' communication is not linked to the resolution. In other words, because characters do not exhibit an active control over their environment (particularly where the resolution is a superhero's intervention to save a human character) or use communication to work through the problem, one's individual physical and communicative actions appear to be only minimally significant. Whether this trend adequately represents how problems are solved in everyday life is one issue future researchers may wish to address. A second issue derived from this pattern speaks to whether television models are the most desirable patterns for children to consume during developmental stages.

Several social stereotypes were reinforced in the Saturday morning period: females were more supportive than males (and, surprisingly, also more flexible in use of more different clusters of responses); parents were defensive and commanding. The two issues mentioned in the paragraph above also are applicable to social stereotypes. Do these stereotypes dominate the actual communication patterns of men, women, and parents in everyday life? Are current portrayals the most desirable models to offer?

Defensiveness also was associated with less "real" character types: animated characters, monsters, and non-humans. If Belson's findings are correct (the less applicable the situation and the characters to real life the smaller the effect on the viewer), then the use of defensive language probably would not be modeled as frequently as more realistic modes of communication. However, as comparative bases are not available at this point, it is unwise to assume that just because a character is animated, his or her verbal messages are not like those uttered by humans. Additionally, younger children may listen more (or less) attentively to animated characters because of their novelty. Research into the degree children attend to different program types or to programs characterized by various types of verbal language could provide greater insights into our understanding of the television effects question.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Two unknown factors will affect how the results of the study can be interpreted: (1) How different or similar is television's language usage from the verbal environment encountered within the family, among peers, or in everyday adult interactions? (2) What kinds of conclusions do children draw about the world from television's verbal language? The first question may be determined through future content analyses of various verbal contexts. Both questions relate to whether television's verbal environment might contribute to observational learning and disinhibitory, inhibitory, and/or facilitation effects. Both questions relate to how similar or dissimilar the language usage is to a child's perceived reality and the kinds of conclusions the child draws from comparing the various contexts. To describe the television verbal environment adequately through content analyses is one problem. Determining how children interact with the verbal environment as a stimulus is a related, more difficult question.

Research needs to be undertaken to assess the degree to which television's verbal reality is similar to or different from the verbal language used in various real-world situations. How is what television characters say different from or similar to what parents or peers say? If there are differences, what role does television play in educating

the child about verbal language usage? Presumably, programs utilizing human actors would be closer to actual conversation and, thus, constitute a more desirable model than the typical stereotyped characterizations offered in cartoons. However, this assumption has yet to be tested.

Research also needs to be undertaken to assess the differences and similarities among types of television programming. Is the verbal environment of prime time different than that of weekday afternoons? Are comedies in regular evening time blocks characterized by different verbal usage patterns than dramatic formats, etc.? Similarly, is the verbal environment from television programming different from or similar to the verbal language used in commercials and other non-program materials?

Once a better understanding of the social reality presented by television is attained through further analysis of the verbal dimensions, policy-makers may begin to assess the desirability of various types of verbal language models broadcast over the airwaves. Hopefully, studies like the one described in this report will assist future researchers to compare language usage over time and to discern how different variables combine to form the social reality of television.

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